

Poor stepchild no more

State road, rail money pouring into South Shore

By Lyndsey Layton
The Patriot Ledger

Suddenly, the South Shore is no longer the state's poor stepchild. Transportation improvements with price tags totaling more than \$1 billion — from pothole patching to rebuilding railroads — are planned or under way in the region from Quincy to the Cape Cod Canal.

This week, the Massachusetts House approved a \$3.8 billion transportation bond bill that includes money for commuter boats,

trains and roads south of Boston. The Senate is expected to approve the bill by April.

It's a far cry from the old days, when South Shore residents complained about being neglected and local lawmakers cried discrimination.

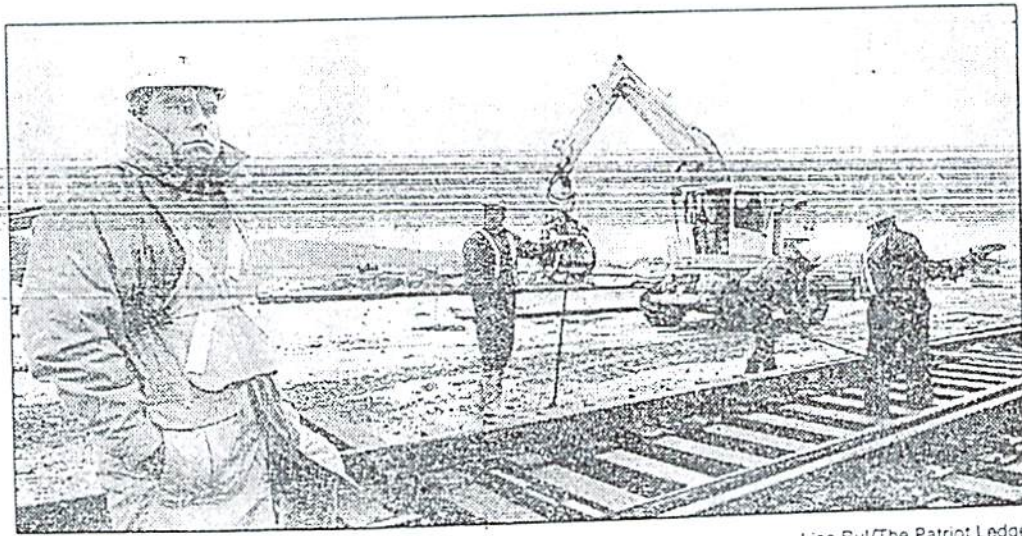
"Ten years ago, the South Shore felt like the poor stepchild," said state Rep. Frank Hynes, D-Marshfield. "Now it's fair to say there's no greater concentration of transportation dollars and resources going, with the possible exception of the Big Dig, than what's taking place in this region."

There's something for everyone in the mix.

Motorists can look forward to expansions of or improvements to major highways, like Route 3 and Route 44, as well as fine tuning that will improve traffic flow at interchanges, such as the one at Route 3 and Route 139.

Commuter boat service will be beefed up in Hingham, with possible permanent expansion to Scituate, Weymouth or other coastal communities.

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MBTA project manager Robert Johnson oversees work on Red Line tracks in Braintree.

Road, rail funds flooding S. Shore

PROJECTS

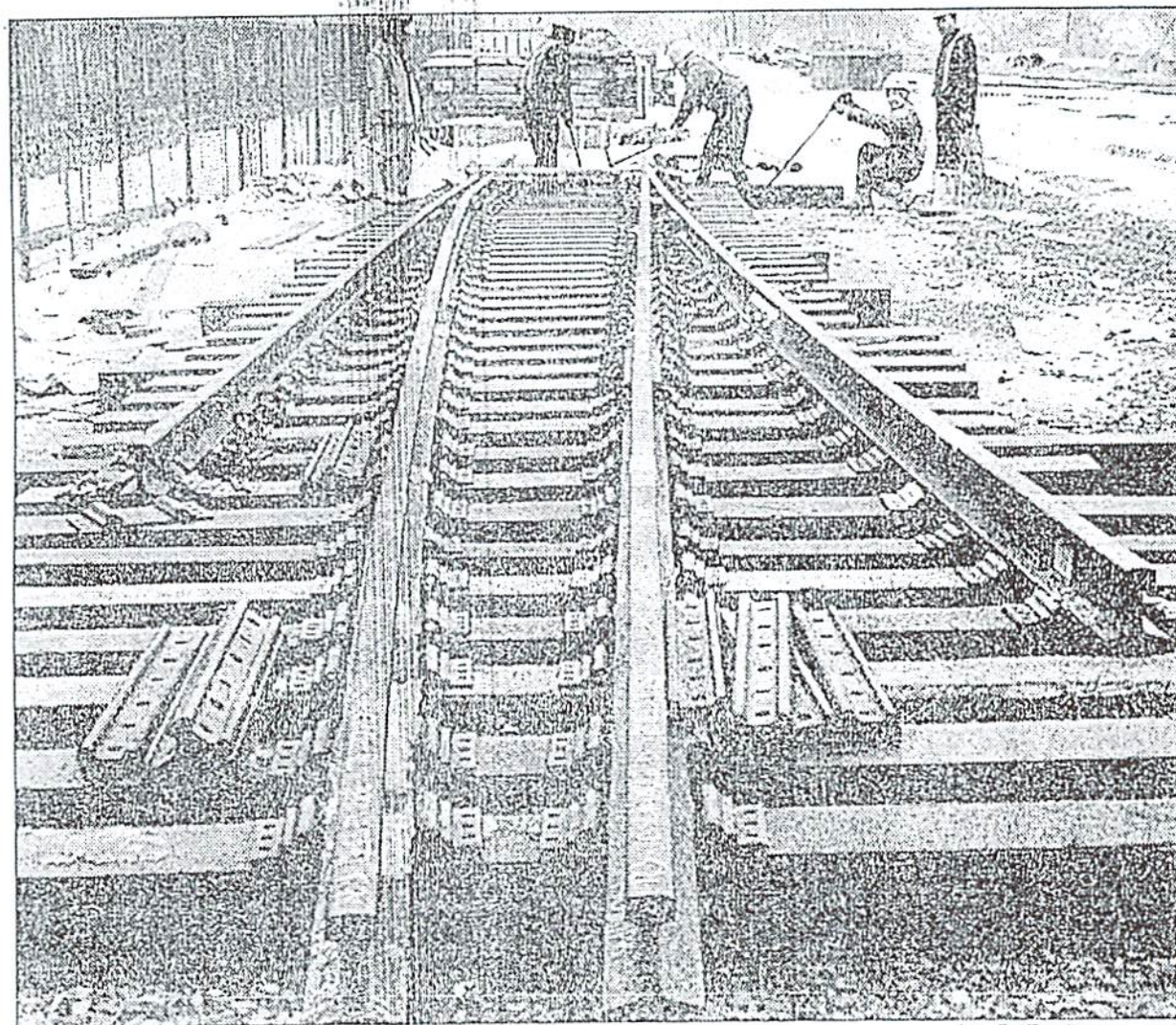
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Rail advocates are awaiting the reopening of the \$700 million Old Colony commuter railroad from Boston to Middleboro, Plymouth and Scituate.

Environmentalists got a 6-mile car pool lane on the Southeast Expressway in November designed to ease congestion on the chronically clogged roadway and improve air quality. Planners are studying whether to create a permanent car pool lane from the Expressway down Route 3 to Cape Cod.

And subway and bus riders will see additional parking at MBTA Red Line stations in Quincy, and possibly Braintree. New park-and-ride lots are also proposed in Pembroke, Kingston, Hanover and Plymouth.

"We used to say, 'You can't get here from there,'" said state Sen. Therese Murray, D-Plymouth, who serves on the Legislature's Transportation Committee. "Now we say you can get here."



Crews work on turnouts for the Red Line tracks near Grossman Drive in Braintree.

Lisa Bul/The Patriot Ledger

The flood of investment in the suburbs south of Boston is attributable to a combination of timing and politics.

The seeds of projects begun long ago are finally yielding fruit. It generally takes a minimum of eight years to move a highway project from idea to construction.

And gradual shifts on key legislative committees have provided political muscle to push projects off the shelf.

When Rep. Thomas Cahir, D-Bourne, became House chairman of the Transportation Committee a year ago, the South Shore won a powerful ally.

Cahir drives from his Bourne home through the south suburbs to Boston most days. He knows firsthand the gridlock on the Southeast Expressway, trouble spots on Route 3 and the lack of transportation alternatives for commuters.

"Lately, there's been gridlock on almost a daily basis," Cahir said, describing his commute. "The South Shore has some serious problems."

Cahir's committee also has become loaded with South Shore voices.

The largest geographic block on the Transportation Committee is from the region. Joining Murray and Hynes are Sen. Robert Hedlund, R-Weymouth, and Reps. Joseph Sullivan, D-Braintree, and Jo Ann Sprague, R-Walpole. Sen. Michael Morrissey, D-Quincy, was added earlier this year.

While those legislators are often divided by party, they are united by local issues and have been among committee's most vocal mem-

Transportation projects on the South Shore

The following South Shore transportation projects are either under way or planned:

- **Commuter trains:** Restoration of the three-branch Old Colony Railroad to Plymouth, Middleboro and Scituate. Service to Plymouth and Middleboro to begin in December; trains to Scituate to roll by 1999. Cost: \$700 million.

- **Commuter boats:** Bond bill includes \$51 million to improve Hingham-Boston service and explore new service from Scituate, Weymouth, Plymouth and other ports. Two-month test service from Scituate in progress.

- **Car pool lane:** Southeast Expressway from Quincy to Dorchester, opened in November. Cost: \$25 million to build, \$1 million a year to maintain. Studies to create a permanent car pool lane from the Expressway down Route 3 are under way.

- **Parking:** Four park-and-ride lots planned for bus riders in Pembroke, Kingston, Hanover and Plymouth. Additional 400 spaces planned at the Hingham shipyard, 1,334 new spaces planned at Quincy Adams MBTA station and 400 new spaces planned at the Quincy Center station. Cost: uncertain.

- **Route 44:** Reconstruction under way to create a new four-lane roadway from Route 3 west through Plymouth, Kingston, Plympton and Carver to Route 58. Cost: \$80 million.

- **Route 3:** Gov. William F. Weld has pledged to widen Route 3 from Weymouth to the Cape Cod Canal. The project would add a lane in each direction for 38 miles and take at least five years. Cost: estimated \$300 million to \$400 million. Bond bill includes \$15 million for project design.

Transportation spending is supposed to be balanced across the state: the bond bill is structured so that a minimum of \$100 million is spent on each of four geographic regions.

But there's plenty of room for

discretionary spending by state officials who want to shower additional money on a specific region or particular projects.

And Gov. William F. Weld, in his bid for the U.S. Senate, has realized

that moving people makes good politics.

His administration is on a transportation binge, planning an aggressive commuter rail expansion to the north, west and south.

The controversy over the Greenbush commuter rail line to Scituate forced the Weld administration to closely examine transportation south of Boston.

And Weld officials found an area with few alternatives for moving people or goods. It is also the fastest-growing section of the state — and home to plenty of voters.

Recent studies by the Metropolitan Planning Council estimate population in Carver, for instance, will grow 67 percent by the year 2020.

Plymouth, Duxbury, Hanson, Kingston and Marshfield have all been identified as high-growth spots, with population estimated to soar 29 to 38 percent by 2020.

"The transportation needs of the South Shore are dramatically apparent," said Michael Swanson, deputy transportation secretary for capital and transportation planning. "The need for investment is multifaceted."

Transportation Secretary James Kerasiotes once lived in Marshfield but says he moved to Medfield partly because of traffic. He remembers long hours hunched over his steering wheel on the Southeast Expressway, his foot shifting from gas pedal to brake.

"I have a bias toward the South Shore," Kerasiotes said. "Having traveled that damned road myself, I feel badly for the commuter that has to put up with it."